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2016

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Recommended Citation

Pell, Claiborne, "White House Conference on Library and Information Services: Hearings S.J. Res. 26 (April 3, 1987): Correspondence 03" (2016). *White House Conference on Library and Information Services: Hearing S.J. Res. 26 (April 3, 1987)*. Paper 8. http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_89/8

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WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE

MR. PELL. Mr. President, today I am introducing legislation that calls for a White House Conference on Library and Information Services to be held in 1989. This proposal arises out of my direct involvement in the very successful 1979 White House Conference that focused national attention on the critical issues then affecting library and information services. The long range benefits that resulted from this Conference were many, but foremost among them were increased state appropriations for libraries and the formation of many statewide Friends of Libraries organizations.

One of the important recommendations of this first White House Conference was that a similar Conference at the federal level be held every ten years "to establish the national information goals and priorities for the next decade, to assure effective transfer of knowledge to citizenry, and to accomplish this goal in light of accelerated changes in information technology and practices."

It is now time to formally establish this second Conference and to begin the serious task of setting an agenda that will properly address the important issues facing libraries today.

A similar proposal, introduced in the 99th Congress, had gathered the bipartisan support of 50 Senators before time ran out, delaying further action until this year.

A White House Conference Preliminary Design Group has already proposed that three overarching themes be the focus for the 1989 Conference: library and information services for productivity, for literacy and for democracy. Each theme is highly topical and will bring attention to areas that are of current concern both to government officials and to those in the library and information services community.

Libraries provide research and information services that are vital to the economic well being of our nation. As access to information becomes more and more important in our modern society, the ability to locate, acquire, organize and use information properly is something that even the average person must now have. The White House Conference will consider how libraries can further contribute to economic vitality and growth.

Illiteracy should rightly be addressed as a crisis of major national importance. Fully one-fifth of the American adult population, or 27 million persons, cannot read beyond the fifth grade level, while another 46 million are only marginally competent in reading and writing skills. This deplorable situation leads directly to high unemployment rates which in turn have a direct bearing on our nation's economic health.

Libraries obviously play a most central role in developing and expanding literacy. Studies have shown that reading skills and verbal expression have increased dramatically in elementary schools simply by adding or extending library activities. One very critical point to note here, however, is that seven percent of our schools still do not have libraries. The tragic problem of illiteracy is, to my mind, one of the most crucial issues for the White House Conference to address.

By coincidence, the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution will occur about the same time as the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services. This event should help focus additional attention on the third theme for the Conference: the importance of information in a democratic society. While information helps government officials make

important decisions, a truly democratic society depends also on the informed participation of its people. Libraries are the information resource centers to which citizens turn to inform themselves.

The Conference shall be planned and conducted under the direction of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science in much the same manner as the Commission coordinated the 1979 Conference. A successful Conference at the national level requires broad-based involvement in the planning process and it is the Commission's responsibility to ensure the participation of individuals and organizations at the local, state, regional and national levels.

To help focus attention on a wide range of issues connected with the initiation of this Conference, I intend to convene a hearing of the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities on an early date in this 100th session of the Congress. Congressman William Ford of Michigan will be introducing an identical resolution in the House of Representatives calling for this important 1989 White House Conference on Library and Information Services.

It is time now for library users, civic leaders and lawmakers at all levels to join earnestly in working with librarians and suppliers of information services to plan a second White House Conference. This Conference will be a significant reaffirmation of our commitment to our libraries. As it is important that this process begin, I urge my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring this legislation.

I ask unanimous consent that the joint resolution be printed in the Record.